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'Reverse Potemkinism'

"Danger Warning" by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak [op-ed, Sept. 7] commits an act of what I would term "reverse Potemkinism." Potemkin created a false village to impress Catherine the Great with his wealth. The Meyer memo cited in the column paints a bleak portrait of the Soviet domestic situation.

But beauty is in the eye of the beholder. How do we know the perceptions in the memo aren't colored by a desire to see a Soviet decline? Or, how do we know the memo's purpose isn't simply an attempt to tell the boss what he wants to hear or to justify CIA activity or even a continued Pentagon buildup?

Not long ago, a certain U.S. president decried a growing U.S. malaise, and now our current leader proclaims

that "America is back." For some, mainly the upper one-fifth on the economic ladder, this is true. For many, however, particularly the bottom one-fifth, union members and residents of the Northeast and Midwest, Mr. Reagan's diagnosis rings a false note.

Is the Soviet Union really worse off than it was 10 years ago, or are we simply paying more attention to it? I am certain the Soviet propaganda machine could (and probably already has) produce a comparable memo portraying the United States slipping into polarized class conflicts in the final stages of self-destructive capitalism.

Whose statistics, whose propaganda, whose memos, whose "reverse Potemkinism" do we believe?

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